

Small Business Advocacy Council

Meeting Agenda

March 29, 2007 8:30 am

- **Approval of December 14th 2006 meeting minutes**
- **Comments from the Chairwoman- Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts**
- **Introduction of meeting attendees**
- **Discussion of member surveys**
- **Discussion of future meeting schedule**
- **Legislative agenda**
- **Healthcare**
- **Member updates and public comment**

March 19, 2007

Dear Small Business Advocacy Council Member or Participant,

Last year I was fortunate to conduct dozens of Main St. tours during which I met hundreds of small business owners. One thing that I kept hearing from these hardworking individuals was that they did not feel that government is tuned in to the needs and concerns of the small business owner. They saw a lot of work being done to help big business in Rhode Island, but not enough being done to help the average small business owner. Based upon those experiences I am committed to working with you to make sure that the voice of small

business will be heard in state government.

I am therefore very excited to announce that the next Small Business Advocacy Council meeting will be held on March 29, 2007 at 8:30 am at the offices of the Economic Development Corporation, 315 Iron Horse Way Suite 101 in Providence.

In this meeting of the Council I will be presenting my thoughts on what we can accomplish together. I will also ask Council members and participants to take a few moments to introduce themselves and share their affiliation as well as their goals for the Council. I will also want to discuss with the Council the possibility of moving some or all future meetings to times and locations that will enable more small business owners to attend.

I will also be discussing some of the thoughts that many of you have offered to members of my staff about how the Council can be most effective. If you have not had an opportunity to offer your thoughts, please feel free to call my office at 222-2371 and speak to Eli Zupnick, Policy Analyst.

My staff will prepare a summary of legislation that has been introduced this session that may be of interest to Council members and participants. I hope to form a Legislative Work Group to review these bills and make recommendations to the full Council about whether the Council should take a position on specific legislation. We will also discuss the formation of a Small Business Health Coordinating Council, as that has emerged as an issue of primary concern in our conversations thus far with Council members and participants. Of course we will also reserve some time at this initial

meeting to take member updates and public comment. I hope you will be able to make it to the meeting, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts

Chairwoman, Small Business Advocacy Council

Future meeting schedule

Many council members have expressed the opinion that more small business owners might be able to attend SBAC meetings if some of the meeting times were moved to after business hours. It was also expressed that in order to encourage participation from around the state, some meetings could be rotated geographically. In order to assist the Council in making a decision about the meeting process I have three alternatives for us to discuss:

Proposal 1: Status Quo - The meeting time will remain 8:30 am. The meetings will always be held in Providence.

Proposal 2: New approach - The meeting time will be moved to 5:30 pm to accommodate business owners. The meetings will rotate geographically around the state and some meetings will be held at business locations.

Proposal 3: Hybrid approach - The meetings will alternate between

mornings in Providence and late afternoons around the state.

Summary of member surveys

Over the past two months our office has conducted interviews with members of the Small Business Advocacy Council. The consensus among the respondents is that the SBAC performs an important function for small business in Rhode Island. They feel that the council brings stakeholders around the table and provides a crucial link between small business and government. While most respondents thought that the SBAC has been an excellent advocate for the small business community, there were a number of suggestions about ways the council can move towards becoming even more effective.

One suggestion made by many of the respondents is that the SBAC should have a specific annual work plan with ongoing updates regarding implementation of the plan. Members feel that there should be tangible outcomes and accomplishments coming out of work done by the Council.

Another recurring theme among the respondents is that they feel guest speakers should be invited to present on highly relevant topic areas and that time allotted for speakers be limited in order that agenda items regarding ongoing Council work can be moved forward as well.

Many of the respondents were small business support organizations. Many of them expressed that the SBAC could do more to raise public awareness of the many services available to small business owners in Rhode Island.

Many respondents also noted that actual small business owners are not typically well represented at Council meetings. Some suggestions made to increase small business owner participation were to rotate the meetings around the state, and to move the meeting time to after business hours.

Respondents were asked to identify the top five issues facing small business in Rhode Island. Using a point system in which the number one response was awarded five points, and the number five response one point, below are the top five issues among all respondents to date:

- 1) Health Care**
- 2) Taxation**
- 3) Workforce**
- 4) Regulations**
- 5) Access to Capital**

The respondents were asked how important they felt various charges of the SBAC were on a scale of one to ten. Below are the average answers:

- The problems and needs of small business. (9.7)
- The role of small business in creating jobs, and what will assist small business in carrying out that role. (9.4)
- The rules and regulations of the various departments, boards and agencies of the state and local government that affect small business. (9.1)
- The policies, practices, and procedures of governmental bodies in dealing with small business. (8.8)
- The promotion of a continuing dialogue between government and small business. (8.1)
- The status of women and minorities as small business owners. (7.5)
- The communication of information concerning state and federal programs that may provide assistance to small business. (6.7)

They were also asked how much time they felt was spent on each of the charges, with ten being a lot of time and one being no time at all. Below are the average answers:

- The problems and needs of small business. (7.3)
- The role of small business in creating jobs, and what will assist small business in carrying out that role. (6)
- The promotion of a continuing dialogue between government and small business. (5.5)
- The status of women and minorities as small business owners. (5.4)
- The rules and regulations of the various departments, boards and

agencies of the state and local government that affect small business.

(4.8)

- **The policies, practices, and procedures of governmental bodies in dealing with small business. (4.5)**

- **The communication of information concerning state and federal programs that may provide assistance to small business. (4)**

Directions

Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation

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Providence, RI 02908

(401) 278-9100

(From riedc.com)

The EDC office is located in an active constructive area. Look for the banners for American Locomotives Works hung along the fence. Park in the lot north of the building and enter our offices through the door with the glass awning. The former address for the American Locomotive Works Development is 555 Valley Street. Please refer to this address when using Google Maps, Mapquest or other mapping services, or simply navigate to our offices using the Google Map below.

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